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1948

GENERAL

Registry Number } E1998/11/65

FROM Mr. Walsh,
Colonial Office
to Mr. Roberts
No.

Dated 7.2.48

Received in Registry } 12.2.48

Incursions into Palestine

Refers to Palestine telegrams regarding the entry into Palestine of armed bands from neighbouring countries. Encloses copies of Jerusalem telegram No.255 and draft reply; also of Jerusalem telegram No.288. It is felt that vigorous protests should continue to be made.

Last Paper.

E 1995

(Minutes.)

HB-137
12

References.

(Print.)

(How disposed of.)

2/12/48) H.A. Watson, C.O.
from Mr. Roberts
9 Hl.

(Action completed.)

H.A. Watson
13/12/48

(Index.)

H.A. Watson
13/12/48

Next Paper.

E 2000

FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

9th February, 1948.

Many thanks for your letter of the 7th February enclosing a draft reply to telegram No. 253 from the High Commissioner for Palestine with the suggestion that the Colonial Secretary would like to see the draft strengthened and amplified.

The Foreign Secretary agreed with this suggestion, and I enclose a redraft of the telegram, which the Foreign Secretary has approved.

(Sd.) F. K. ROBERTS.

**N.D. Watson, Esq.,
Colonial Office.**

Registry
No.

Top Secret.
~~Secret.~~
~~Confidential.~~
~~Restricted.~~
~~Open.~~

HB.

Draft.

Jerusalem

Telegram.

No.

(Date)

Repeat to :—

En Clair.
Code.
Cypher.

Distribution :—

Copies to :—

F. O.,

194 .

TOP SECRET

Despatched

M.

Your telegram No. 288 and previous telegrams referring to entry into Palestine of armed bands from the neighbouring Arab States.

The Foreign Secretary has assured me that most vigorous protests will continue to be made to the Governments of Arab States concerned if such incidents recur. There is however a limit to the effectiveness of our protests owing to the strength of popular feeling in these States in favour of support for the Arabs of Palestine against the implementation of the United Nation's plan. In particular, I do not think attempts to persuade the Arab Governments to secure the withdrawal of the bands which have invaded Palestine would meet with any success whatever, since those Governments would reply that they had no control over the irregulars.

2. Your suggestion that sanctions against Syria might be threatened has been under consideration. But it seems unlikely that any practicable sanction would have the desired effect of inducing the Syrian Government to prevent the infiltration of armed bands into Palestine. It therefore seems undesirable to cause general deterioration in British relations with Syria for no practical purpose.

/3...

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

3. I appreciate your anxiety to give the fullest publicity to the protests which H.M. Representatives have made in Arab Capitals. But it is contrary to usual diplomatic practice to publish the terms of such communications between Governments whose relations are in general friendly, and I do not think we can depart from the normal practice in this instance. You will have seen that the Foreign Secretary, answering a Parliamentary question on the 4th February, said that the Syrian Government "have been left in no doubt as to the serious view that would be taken by H.M. Government of any further violations of the Palestine frontier."

4. I recognise the extreme difficulty presented by the nature of the frontier and the heavy commitments of the security forces, and am much concerned at the situation depicted in paras. 1 to 3 of your telegram No. 252. I note however that in para. 3 of your telegram No. 288 you say that it would be possible for the security forces to engage the next band which attempts to enter Palestine. I assume this to mean that they could be engaged on the frontier before they had dispersed. The Foreign Secretary does not consider that concern for Arab susceptibilities should be allowed to prevent you from exercising your right and duty to protect the frontier of Palestine so long as the Mandate exists. Subject to your views on the effect which such action would have inside Palestine, we therefore see no reason why the entry of Arab irregulars should not be prevented by force. But such action

should ~~be~~ only
be taken insofar
as it does not
delay the
process of
withdrawal and
every effort
should be made
to reduce any
blood shed to
the minimum.

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

E

see Ray A

The Colonial Secretary has sent over the attached draft telegram to Jerusalem, on the subject of the entry into Palestine of armed bands from neighbouring Arab States, and has suggested that the draft should be amplified and strengthened.

What the High Commissioner would like us to do is:

- (1) put pressure on the Arab States to secure the withdrawal of the bands from Palestine;
- (2) publish the protests we have made to the Governments of Syria and Transjordan;
- (3) threaten sanctions against Syria.

With regard to (1), it is quite certain that any Arab Government which we approached with the request that they should withdraw the Arab irregulars from Palestine would reply that it had no control over them. As for (2) we asked H.M. Minister in Amman for his views on this suggestion, and we agree with his reply (in E.1482 attached). The High Commissioner's third proposal is that we might employ the threat of sanctions against Syria. Such action would obviously have an adverse effect on our relations with Syria generally, but I do not think it would achieve the object which the High Commissioner has in mind by inducing the Syrians to stop the infiltration of armed Arabs into Palestine.

It will be seen from Jerusalem telegram No. 288, para. 3., that the High Commissioner suggests that the only alternative to the course of action he recommends is that British forces should engage the next band on the frontier. He appears to think that we should regard such action as politically inadvisable. But I think the Arabs must recognise that the Palestine Government are fully entitled to defend their frontiers so long as the Mandate lasts, that is to say until the 15th May, and I suggest that we should inform the High Commissioner that there are no political objections to the effective exercise of this right.

I submit a suggested redraft of the telegram to Jerusalem.

H. Beeley

H. Beeley.

7th February, 1948.

I think on the whole this is right - we have already warned the Arab countries against permitting irregular forces to cross the frontier and have appealed to them not to ensure that no clashes take place with our troops. But action should only be
- / taken

taken insofar as it does not delay
the process of withdrawal, and every effort should
be made to reduce any bloodshed to the minimum.
withnight

7.2

C O P Y

TOP SECRET

Draft telegram

to:
JERUSALEM.

Your telegram No. 288 and previous telegrams referring to entry into Palestine of armed bands from the neighbouring Arab States.

The Foreign Secretary has assured me that most vigorous protests will continue to be made to the Governments of Arab States concerned if such incidents recur. There is, however, a limit to the effectiveness of our protests owing to the strength of popular feeling in these States in favour of support for the Arabs of Palestine against the implementation of the United Nations' plan. In particular, I do not think attempts to persuade the Arab Governments to secure the withdrawal of the bands which have invaded Palestine would meet with any success whatever, since those Governments would reply that they had no control over the irregulars.

2. Your suggestion that sanctions against Syria might be threatened has been under consideration. But it seems unlikely that any practicable sanction would have the desired effect of inducing the Syrian Government to prevent the infiltration of armed bands into Palestine. It therefore seems undesirable to cause general deterioration in British relations with Syria for no practical purpose.

3. I appreciate your anxiety to give the fullest publicity to the protests which H.M. Representatives have made in Arab Capitals. But it is contrary to usual diplomatic practice to publish the terms of such communications between Governments whose relations are in general friendly, and I do not

think/

think we can depart from the normal practice in this instance. You will have seen that the Foreign Secretary, answering a Parliamentary Question on the 4th February, said that the Syrian Government "have been left in no doubt as to the serious view that would be taken by H.M. Government of any further violations of the Palestine frontier".

4. I recognise the extreme difficulty presented by the nature of the frontier and the heavy commitments of the security forces, and am much concerned at the situation depicted in paragraphs 1 to 3 of your telegram No. 252. I note, however, that in paragraph 3 of your telegram No. 288 you say that it would be possible for the security forces to engage the next band which attempts to enter Palestine. I assume this to mean that they could be engaged on the frontier before they had dispersed. The Foreign Secretary does not consider that concern for Arab susceptibilities should be allowed to prevent you from exercising your right and duty to protect the frontier of Palestine so long as the Mandate exists. Subject to your views on the effect which such action would have inside Palestine, we therefore see no reason why the entry of Arab irregulars should not be prevented by force. But such action should only be taken insofar as it does not delay the process of withdrawal, and every effort should be made to reduce any bloodshed to the minimum.

E 1098

12 FEB 1948

7th February, 1948.

Dear Roberts,

My Secretary of State has received various telegrams from the High Commissioner for Palestine, of which copies have been sent to the Foreign Office, referring to the entry into Palestine of armed bands from the neighbouring Arab States, and urging both that effective protests should be made to the Governments concerned and that these protests should be published.

I enclose copies of the High Commissioner's telegram No. 253 and of the draft reply to it which my Secretary of State was about to send over for Mr. Bevin's concurrence when the further telegram No. 288 (of which a copy is also enclosed) reached him. In view of the High Commissioner's latest representations, Mr. Creech Jones hopes that it will be possible to strengthen the draft telegram by informing the High Commissioner of further definite action which has been taken. At the same time he would like to amplify the reference in the draft to sanctions, in view of the suggestion in the last sentence of the High Commissioner's telegram No. 288.

Mr. Creech Jones realises, of course, the difficulty of making our protests effective in present circumstances and he is informed that there would be objection, on grounds of diplomatic usage, to the publication of any notes of protest presented to the Arab Governments in this connection; but he feels sure that Mr. Bevin will agree that His Majesty's Representatives should continue to make the most vigorous possible protests.

I should be grateful for the earliest convenient reply.

Yours sincerely,

H. Deane Water

Private Secretary.

F.K. Roberts, Esq., C.M.G.

IMMEDIATE

HIGHCOMA

No.

TOP SECRET.

JERUSALEM.

Your telegram No. 253 and related telegrams referring to entry into Palestine of armed bands from the neighbouring Arab States. Foreign Secretary has assured me that most vigorous protests will continue to be made to Governments of Arab States concerned if such incidents recur. There is, however, a limit to effectiveness of our protests owing to strength of popular feeling in these States in favour of support for Arabs of Palestine against implementation of United Nations Plan and because of absence of any practicable sanction. I appreciate your anxiety to give fullest publicity to protests which H.M. Representatives have made in Arab capitals. Publication of actual texts of such protests is however open to the objection that this step would normally be the prelude to a rupture of diplomatic relations and consequently would be authorised only if our relations with Governments concerned had reached a critical stage.

I recognise the extreme difficulty presented by the nature of the frontier and the heavy commitments of the Security Forces and am much concerned at the situation depicted in paragraphs 1-3 of your telegram No. 252. I trust that apparent intention of these bands to remain quiescent until the termination of the Mandate will prevent our Forces from becoming involved in open conflict with them.

INWARD TELEGRAM

TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

Cypher(O.T.P.)

FROM PALESTINE(Gen. Sir A. Cunningham)

D. 4th February, 1948.

R. 5th " " 06.45 hrs.

No.288 Secret

Addressed to S. of S.	
Repeated to Cairo,	No.34
" " Damascus,	No.300
" " Beirut,	No.301
" " Amman,	No.302
" " Baghdad,	No. 20
" " Jedda,	No. 19.

Amman telegram to Foreign Office No.57 repeated to me only.

The incursion of armed and organized bands from Arab States has to be considered from three aspects:-

- (a) Its effect on already difficult problem of maintaining law and order in Palestine;
- (b) the embarrassment caused to H.M.G. before the U.N.;
- (c) the relations of H.M.G. with Arab world as a whole.

2. Points (a) and (b) do not require further elaboration except a reminder that Sir Alexander Cadogan has promised Commission that mandatory power will defend whole country against armed aggression.

3. Point (c) does not appear to have received sufficient attention. It seems to me that there is a tendency to be concerned more with precarious maintenance of day to day good relations with Arab Governments than with prevention of events which, if they continue, may well have disastrous results for H.M.G.'s relations with the entire Arab world. It will surely be appreciated that, in view of considerations (a) and (b) above, this Government cannot afford to remain passive in face of Arab incursions from Syria, Trans-Jordan and elsewhere and that more drastic action may soon be unavoidable. Such action could only be a large scale military engagement with the next band which attempts to enter, which hitherto has not been undertaken, not because security forces could not do it, but because I am unwilling to precipitate its consequences. Control of frontiers

to the extent suggested by H.M. Minister at Amman in paragraph 2 of his telegram under reference would almost certainly involve just such an action. The Arabs would certainly be defeated, probably with heavy casualties. The effect of a (group omitted) against a band containing representatives from several Arab States upon British relations with those States and its effect in Palestine can readily be imagined.

4. I must emphasise that in this matter prevention is better, perhaps easier, and certainly less detrimental to good relations, than cure. In paragraph 4 of my telegram No. 171 (repeated to all stations and marked important) I asked that strongest possible pressure be brought on Arab League and Arab States to secure withdrawal of band which entered Palestine on 21st January. This has not been done. In view of Arab Higher Committee's inability to control this force, which is under command of Fawzi Kawukji, who is at loggerheads with Mufti but persona grata with certain Arab States, the only alternative effective action is a military engagement with band. This is by now ruled out by its dispersion and H.M.G. are thus saddled with task of explaining why no effective action was taken either in Palestine or elsewhere.

5. I should in no (way omitted) wish to adopt an hostile attitude towards Trans-Jordan and appreciate the King's difficult position, but I must emphasise that Trans-Jordan has recently permitted passage through its territory into Palestine of what were in fact organised military contingents and that Trans-Jordan military forces have obstructed Palestine Police in their efforts to close frontier to such transit. There is now no doubt that there was a second incursion via Damiyeh Bridge. Such action, I suggest, justifies strongest possible protest even to a friendly government. The question of (group omitted) (destroying) bridges is no threat but a possibility which may be forced on us as a necessary and reasonable security measure.

6. I trust that H.M.G., taking into consideration all aspects of the problem, will feel able to (instruct) and to take strong action on lines repeatedly requested by me. There is, however, no doubt that Syrian nationals are at the root of the trouble, and may well be trying to embroil Trans-Jordan with us. I therefore would suggest that however matter is dealt with in Trans-Jordan, concurrent and firm action is taken with Syrian Government. Perhaps in its case there may be possibility of threat of sanctions.

Copies sent to:-

Foreign Office
War Office (M.O.4)

- Mr. H. Beeley
- Lt. Col. M.M. Charteris

INWARD TELEGRAM

TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

Cypher (O.T.P.)

FROM PALESTINE (Gen. Sir A. Cunningham)

D. 1st February, 1948.

R. 1st " " 17.40 hrs.

No. 253

Addressed to S. of S.

Repeated to Washington, No. 55 (please pass to UKDEL).

"	"	Amman,	No. 270.
"	"	Baghdad,	No. 19.
"	"	Beirut,	No. 271.
"	"	Damascus,	No. 272.
"	"	Jedda,	No. 18.
"	"	Cairo,	No. 32. (please pass to B.M.E.O. as my No. 22)

My telegram No. 171.

Incursion into Palestine.

Reliable information indicates that a further party of Arab Liberation Army Troops arrived in Palestine via Jisr Damiyeh during the night of 29th January/30th January. Party numbered some 950 men and was transported in 19 vehicles; it is reported to consist of Syrian Iraqi Trans-Jordan and Palestine nationals all in uniform and well armed. It has now dispersed in small units among the villages of Nablus Jenin and Tulkarm sub districts. Alleged that troops will be employed in a "defensive role".

2. Report adds that further party is expected shortly.

3. Action is being taken to (corrupt group) Damiyeh and Sheik Hussein Bridges, see my telegram No. 197 not repeated to all. I would refer to my telegram No. 266 to Beirut repeated to Cairo and Damascus and to you as No. 248, and stress once more the necessity for preventive action outside Palestine. This open flouting of our frontier is making both British Government and our Administration here appear ridiculous.

Copies sent to:-

Foreign Office

War Office (M.O.4.)

- Mr. H. Beeley

- Lt. Col. M.M. Charteris